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To the RT. HON. HERBERT SAMUEL, M.P.,

Secretary of State for the Home Department.

REPORT

BY

SIR RALPH PAGET, K.C.M.G.,

British Commissioner for Serbia,

ON THE

Retreat of part of the British Hospital Units from Serbia, October–December, 1915.

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The following is an extract from a letter which Sir Ralph Paget has received from the Foreign Office over the signature of Sir Edward Grey:

"I am also glad to have this opportunity of testifying to my high appreciation of the courage, devotion and ability shown by all the Units under your direction and of the behaviour of the doctors, nurses, and orderlies during this period of trial and danger."

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To the RT. HON. HERBERT SAMUEL, M.P.,

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REPORT

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RETREAT OF PART OF THE BRITISH HOSPITAL UNITS FROM SERBIA, OCTOBER—DECEMBER, 1915.

Sir,

Although, since the moment in December, 1914, when the Austrian army had been driven back in confusion over the Danube and Save, scarcely a day had passed without an exchange of artillery fire between the Serbian positions at Belgrade and the Austrian batteries round Semlin, this bombardment was mostly merely of a desultory nature. Gradually, moreover, an understanding had been reached with the enemy mutually to avoid bombardment of the actual towns. The continuance of this state of affairs for many months, together with evidence to the effect that very few Austrian troops remained in Southern Hungary, possibly gave rise in Serbia to a false sense of security, and to the belief that the Austrians had need of their troops elsewhere, and consequently, that invasion from that quarter no longer threatened.

Towards the end of September, however, it was rumoured that a German army was being concentrated at Temesvar under the leadership of General Mackensen. Taken in conjunction with the news that the Turkish army was seriously in want of munitions, owing to the refusal of Roumania to permit the supplies sent by Germany to pass through her territory, this concentration was interpreted as indicating an intention either to overawe Roumania or to force the Danube, and gain access to the Bulgarian railways through the north-east corner of Serbia.

From this time on events developed rapidly; and presently little room was left for doubt as to the Austro-German intentions.

The attitude of Bulgaria during the negotiations, which had been conducted with a view to securing to her the cession by Serbia of the disputed portion of Macedonia, had been consistently unsatisfactory; and she now, following almost immediately upon the news of the German concentration of troops on the northern bank of the Danube, announced her intention to mobilize whilst temporarily disguising her true object by proclaiming that she

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would observe an armed neutrality. This she declared to be necessitated by the near approach of war to her frontiers.

The Bulgarian general mobilization order was issued on the 22nd September.

Whilst the ties which united Bulgaria to Russia, and other political considerations, made it appear unlikely that she would actually enter the lists against the Allies and attack Serbia, the possibility of such a contingency, with its evident gravity from a military point of view, was nevertheless not entirely unforeseen. I had therefore thought it advisable, on more than one occasion, to discuss with the Serbian military authorities the question as to how the security of the British hospital units, situated throughout the country, could best be provided for in such an event.

On these occasions Colonel Ghentchitch, the principal medical officer of the Serbian army, had invariably assured me that the safety of the foreign units would be his first care, and that he had at his disposal sufficient transport for the removal of the units located in the north of Serbia, more especially at Belgrade, to places of safety, together with the wounded and the hospital equipment in case a retreat should become necessary.

Notwithstanding the assurances I had thus already received, as the situation grew threatening I thought it right again to visit Colonel Ghentchitch at Kragujevatz and to impress upon him the necessity of making adequate preparation. At this interview, which took place on the 1st October, Colonel Ghentchitch repeated to me that he was quite prepared for any eventuality. In addition to discussing the question with the Serbian military authorities, I had at various times mentioned to the heads of the several units the possibility that a rapid retreat might under certain circumstances become necessary, and had urged the consequent desirability of considering beforehand what steps should be taken in such an event, and of holding their units in a mobile condition.

The attitude which my remarks in this sense provoked appeared to be that under no circumstances could the doctors and nurses be induced to abandon the wounded in their hospitals; that they had not been sent out to retreat upon the first approach of danger; and that after months of inactivity they welcomed the prospect of serious work.

These sentiments, whilst most laudable, I felt it my duty to combat. I represented that the hospital equipment had been provided from home at a very considerable expense for the use of the Serbians and not for the use of the enemy; that its capture

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would materially benefit the enemy; that the services of the personnel would be lost to the Serbian army, which would have every need of hospital help in its retreat; and that if they remained they might possibly nurse 200 Serbians, but would then be detailed for nursing the wounded of the enemy; whilst if they retreated in good time with their equipment they might eventually nurse as many as 2,000 Serbians or more. Finally I stated that it was not a question of personal bravery but solely one of expediency, and I added that of course every effort would be made to remove the wounded together with the hospital equipment.

Incidentally, I may mention that when the moment arrived the majority of wounded who could by any possibility walk left the hospital, whilst I understand that in most instances pending the hospitals being taken over by the enemy, orderlies or Austrian prisoners were left to attend to the wants of the wounded who could not be moved.

On the 5th October a report reached Nish that Belgrade had been bombarded. As such reports were frequent little attention was paid to this at the time, and it was not until two days later that it transpired how serious this bombardment had been, and that it became evident that this was the commencement of the Austro-German offensive.

There were at the time two British units in Belgrade: the Second British Farmers, sent out by the Serbian Relief Fund, and the Eastern Auxiliary, under the charge of Admiral Troubridge. As the former was established in a building much exposed to any shell fire directed against the town I felt considerable anxiety concerning its safety. I therefore telephoned at once to Colonel Ghentchitch at Kragujevatz, requesting him if necessary to withdraw the unit to a place less exposed, either at Belgrade itself or further south on the railway line. I likewise telephoned to Admiral Troubridge begging him to advise the unit as he might consider best.

I subsequently learned that at the time (October 7th) instructions had already been sent to the Farmers' unit to evacuate their hospital. Admiral Troubridge's unit left Belgrade the following day shortly before the Germans entered the town.

Details of the experiences of the Second Farmers' unit will be found in an interesting report drawn up by Mr. R. C. Grey. Several shells fell in the hospital before it had been evacuated; and one nurse, Miss Lock, and one orderly, Mr. Catleugh, were wounded; but as I was not present myself I find it difficult to

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give any particulars of the actual events. I wish, however, to record that the most invaluable help was rendered to this unit by Dr. Ryan, who was in charge of the American Red Cross hospital at Belgrade, and who was untiring in his efforts to assist the British unit to save its personnel, its wounded, and its equipment. We certainly owe him a very great debt of gratitude.

After leaving Belgrade the Second Farmers' unit, which, I regret to say, had been unable to find any transport for its equipment, first halted at Mladmovatz, but was subsequently established in a hospital at Jagodina, some distance south, which contained sufficient Serbian equipment to enable work to be carried on. Admiral Troubridge's staff was sent on to me at Nish and was placed under my charge.

Up to this time, although the Bulgarian army was gradually massing on the Serbian Frontier, its delay in commencing active hostilities appeared to indicate the intention to immobilize a large number of Serbian troops and thus facilitate the piercing of the north-east corner of Serbia by the German forces, with the mere object of establishing communication with Turkey through Bulgaria, rather than the serious intention of Bulgaria to invade Serbian territory—an action which would be bound to involve her in a state of war with Russia and her Allies. Moreover, the impression prevailed in Serbia that, should Bulgaria enter upon active hostilities, her first move would be to join hands with the Germans in the north and not from the very outset to make an independent attack upon Macedonia, the frontier of which was thought to be strongly guarded by Serbian troops, and where she would be likely to come into immediate conflict with the Allied troops which were disembarking at Salonika, and were said to be upon their way to Skoplje.

Under this supposition, for the time being, Skoplje and everything further south, likewise the towns on the line between Skoplje and Mitrovitza, appeared comparatively secure. The natural course to follow, therefore, seemed to be to evacuate the wounded from the hospitals in the north towards the south. Together with Colonel Sondermeyer, the surgeon chief inspector of military hospitals, I urged this policy on Colonel Ghentchitch, suggesting that the wounded able to travel should be sent without delay to Skoplje, which had accommodation for some 15,000, and from there so far as practicable on to Monastir. I also took steps to despatch a portion of the Red Cross and Serbian Relief Fund stores under my charge in the same direction; but as events turned out it was already too late, for on the 16th October the railway line was cut between Nish and Skoplje.

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This occurrence was, in the first instance, represented by the Serbian authorities merely as a Bulgarian cavalry raid, and it was thought that with the despatch of some regiments of Serbian troops communication would be soon restored. Notwithstanding these hopes the presence of Bulgarian forces at Vranya made it appear to me advisable to telegraph to Lady Paget that she should watch events closely, and be prepared to move with her whole hospital either to Monastir or to some town on the Skoplje-Mitrovitza line, as might seem best to her after consultation with General Popovitch, the Governor-General of Southern Serbia.

This telegram, it subsequently transpired, did not reach Lady Paget until four days later. Although this fact had in itself no particular bearing on events, it may serve to illustrate the difficulties of the situation generally if I here state that practically from the moment the Germans set foot in Belgrade, telegraphic, telephonic, postal and railway communication, although still maintained, became wholly uncertain and a matter of chance.

Some three days later, having been unable in the meanwhile to obtain communication with Lady Paget's hospital, I decided to endeavour to reach Skoplje by motor-car myself. The continued occupation of Vranya by the Bulgarians rendered it necessary for me to take the road leading from Nish through Prokuplje Kurshumlieh (the old Turkish frontier) to Pristina—a considerable detour. This road, never of the best, had been reduced to a deplorable condition by three weeks of incessant rain, and between Kurshumlieh and Prepolatz, where a pass of some altitude has to be surmounted, it required the united energies of two oxen and some 30 Austrian prisoners, who fortunately happened to be on the road, to drag my motor-car through the mud.

With regard to these prisoners it may be interesting to note that I overtook probably some 10,000 on the march towards the south. They were already then short of food and suffering considerable hardships. It was stated that no bread had been served out for two days, whilst they had no shelter of any kind and were simply lying by the roadside in the rain. They were being sent to repair this and other roads, a fact which indicates that the military authorities were none too sanguine about the re-opening of the railway line, and were preparing for a retreat on Pristina.

From Pristina I was able to continue in my motor-car as far as Ferisovitch, but here it was necessary to take the railway. The Serbian authorities at Ferisovitch appeared to possess very

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little accurate information as to the actual state of affairs at Skoplje; in fact, it was stated to me that Skoplje was probably already in the hands of the Bulgarians and that it would be impossible for me to reach the town, but I naturally decided to proceed as far as the train would carry me. Signs that the Serbian forces were in full retreat were evident on all sides. On arrival at Skoplje, however, some four hours after leaving Ferisovitch, I learnt that the Bulgarian army was still about 15 miles distant, and would probably not enter the town until the following day.

The town at the time appeared to be almost entirely deserted. Except for a few gendarmes with rifles there was no one to be seen in the streets. I was met by Lady Paget at the station, and she told me that she had been requested by the Serbian military authorities when the moment came for them to leave the town—which would not be defended—to take charge of the situation generally and with her unit to give assistance to any Serbians who might remain, and to preserve order as far as in her power lay.

I enquired of Lady Paget why her hospital had not been removed according to the arrangement previously arrived at between us, either to Monastir or Pristina. Her reply was that every effort had been made to this end. Everything had, in fact, been ready for departure and some 20 nurses had even gone to Pristina; but at the last moment the necessary transport for the wounded and equipment had not been forthcoming.

Some three days previous to my visit Lady Paget had, at the earnest request of General Popovitch, herself gone to Salonika to see what hope there might be of assistance for Skoplje from the Allied troops. On her return she learnt that, during her absence, Dr. Maitland, in view of the threatening situation, had caused the hospital to be placed in readiness to be moved and had applied to General Popovitch for the necessary transport. Owing to some confusion as to the exact time when the hospital staff should start and the locality to which it should be moved, the Serbian authorities were unable to supply the transport needed for the equipment and wounded when it was required, and the staff of the hospital then represented that without their equipment they could be of no use to anyone and refused to quit Skoplje.

This decision having been once reached, and it being obviously impossible for me at that late hour to attempt any other arrangement for the removal of the unit, there remained only the duty of considering whether any steps could be taken to

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provide for its safety on the entry of the Bulgarians and whether my personal presence in Skoplje could in any way contribute to this end. After consultation with Lady Paget and Dr. Maitland it was decided that it would serve no purpose for me to remain, and that the interests of the other units still in the north of Serbia demanded my return to Nish.

On leaving Skoplje I expressed concern to Lady Paget as regards the large amount of stores at her hospital falling into the enemy's hands, but I learnt from her that she had distributed a very large amount of these stores to the Serbian troops during the last days who had passed in front of her hospital in their retreat, and that she would continue to do so until the arrival of the Bulgarians.

Shortly after my return to Nish I learnt that the Bulgarians had occupied Skoplje on the day following my departure, October 22nd. Since that time I have been unable to obtain any communication with Lady Paget's unit.

Meanwhile, in view of the fact that with the cutting of the line at Vranya the importance of Nish as a railway centre had entirely ceased, I had closed the rest-house and had sent the ladies assisting in its management to Vrnjatchka Banja.

The transfer of the Government offices and of the foreign representatives to Kralievo on the 20th October is evidence of the serious view of the situation that was already taken by the Serbian Government at this time. The population was likewise fast leaving Nish, which, after suffering from overcrowding for many months, soon assumed a completely deserted aspect. As the result of a conversation which I had immediately on my return from Skoplje with the Prime Minister, I came to the conclusion that it was only a question of days before communication between Nish and the north and west of Serbia would be threatened by the Bulgarian advance at Knajevatz. It seemed, therefore, advisable to make rapid preparations for the future, and to despatch to the Krusevatz-Kralievo line as many stores as possible for the use of the Nish staff and other units who were gradually being driven down from the north. With this object some five trucks containing tents, blankets, rice, sugar, and other foodstuffs were sent off under the charge of three orderlies to Kralievo for the purpose of establishing a camp at that place. A greater quantity of stores might have been despatched had it not been that the railway department at Nish was altogether unable to furnish the necessary trucks. In any case, however, the congestion of traffic at Krusevatz, the junction of the lines,

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presently became so great that of the five trucks sent off by me from Nish only three ever reached Kralievo.

It should be borne in mind that even so late as the last days of October the impression prevailed that although the Austro-Germans would undoubtedly attempt to seize the main line running north and south up to Nish where the line for Sofia branches off, such places as Kralievo and Vrnjatchka Banja on the narrow gauge line running east and west might for some time still remain free from attack.

On the 24th October the Serbian headquarter staff moved from Kragujevatz to Krusevatz—an indication that the former town was seriously threatened. I had been unable, owing to the interruption of telegraphic and telephonic communication, to ascertain what dispositions had been made regarding the British units at Kragujevatz, Valievo, Jagodina, and Mlademovatz; I therefore went by motor-car to Krusevatz, some four hours distant from Nish, on the 26th October. On arrival I was informed by Colonel Phillips, our military attaché, who had accompanied the headquarter staff, that although he had heard of the transfer of Dr. Hutchinson's unit (Scottish Women) from Valievo to Poshega, so far as he was aware the British units established at Kragujevatz still remained there on account of lack of transport for their removal. This information caused me to proceed at once from Krusevatz to Kragujevatz. The journey which under normal conditions should be accomplished in about two hours by motor-car, owing to the terrible condition of the road and the number of troops with their baggage trains in full retreat towards the south, occupied some six hours. The town of Kragujevatz appeared to be practically abandoned, and it was with considerable relief that on reaching the quarters of the Scottish Women's unit I found these deserted. I was subsequently informed at the Arsenal that the British units, namely, the Scottish Women's, Mrs. Stobart's, and the Wounded Allies' had left, some by train and some by road, during the previous day. At the Arsenal itself every preparation had been made to set fire to all material which could be of use to the enemy.

Between Kragujevatz and Nish, to which I returned the same night, I passed through Jagodina, and learnt on enquiring from Captain Georgevitch, of the railway transport department, that all arrangements had been made for the transport of the Second Farmers' unit from there the following morning.

The impression which I gathered on this trip was that the German advance, which had thus far been slow, was increasing in rapidity, and that the safety of railway communication between

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Nish and other parts of Serbia was seriqusly threatened. I therefore determined to despatch the remainder of the staff employed in the Nish stores to Kralievo the following day, and also to leave myself for Krusevatz, in order to be in closer touch with the units which were already on the Krusevatz-Kralievo line.

I had already some days previously discussed with Dr. Dold and his brother, and some other American gentlemen who for some time past had been engaged in relief work in Serbia, the question of handing over to them the stores remaining in our depots at Nish, which it has not been possible to send to Kralievo. They had very kindly consented to take them over in order to protect them, so far as possible, against any looting; and to distribute them among the needy population of Nish, or to restore them to me should there be a fortunate turn in the situation. On the day, therefore, of my departure from Nish the stores were handed over. I also caused all the documents, except accounts in my office, to be burnt, as it was clearly impossible to transport them about the country.

Owing to the constantly increasing congestion on the railway, the journey between Nish and Krusevatz, some 50 miles in all, required 22 hours. This delay was due to the fact that at Krusevatz, where the main line meets the narrow gauge line, more than 3,000 trucks loaded with war material, foodstuffs, etc., had collected. Unfortunately, nearly all this subsequently fell into the hands of the enemy. Immediately upon my arrival I had an interview with Colonel Ghentchitch, with the object of ascertaining what plans he might have formed as to the future movements and distribution of the units, and the possibilities of establishing them in hospitals where those who had saved their equipment might again undertake some work.

I ascertained at Krusevatz during the next two days that the distribution of the units was as follows:—Dr. Inglis (Scottish Women) with her unit from Kragujevatz and a contingent from Lazarevatz under Mrs. Haverfield, had arrived at Krusevatz; Dr. Banks, of the Red Cross, and Dr. Barrie were still in their hospitals at Vrnjatchka Banja, at which place were also the Second British Farmers' unit from Belgrade under Mr. Parsons, the Wounded Allies' unit under Dr. Aspland (from Kragujevatz). Dr. Hutchinson, who with her unit of Scottish Women had originally been sent from Valievo to Poshega, had found it necessary to move first of all to Tchachak and subsequently also to Vrnjatchka Banja, on account of the advance of an Austrian force from the west; Mrs. Stobart's unit under Dr. May, and a contingent of the same unit composed of detachments from Mrs. Stobart's

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dispensaries under Dr. Cockburn, had been brought down by road from Kragujevatz to Kralievo through Gori Milanovatz—the former had been despatched direct to the monastery of Studenitza, some 10 miles off the Kralievo-Rashka road, while the latter remained at Kralievo; a unit of Scottish Women under Dr. McGregor was likewise to be found at Kralievo, where it had established a dressing station in the civil hospital.

On the 29th October I summoned a meeting of the heads of the units at Vrnjatchka Banja I endeavoured to place before them the situation as clearly as I could. I stated that there appeared to be little hope of saving any part of northern Serbia from invasion by the enemy, and that therefore the units had now to make the choice between moving south towards the towns in the Sanjak of Novi Bazar, and thence, if necessary, escaping through Montenegro and Albania, or remaining where they found themselves at present, and being inevitably captured. I added that when I spoke of moving towards the Sanjak it must be understood that practically all hospital equipment must be abandoned, as there would be no transport procurable, and it was doubtful even whether it would be possible to secure sufficient transport for the personnel, together with a small amount of their personal belongings. As regards this, however, I would do my best, but I wished it to be clearly understood that under existing circumstances the transport, the accommodation, and the provisioning of any considerable number of persons on a journey through Montenegro or Albania would be an extremely difficult matter; that there would be in all probability great discomfort and even dangers to be encountered, and that therefore all persons would undertake such an expedition entirely at their own risk and on their own responsibility. In any case I suggested that only those who were able-bodied and felt capable of enduring hardships should make the attempt. On the other hand, I encouraged the departure of orderlies of military age. I requested the heads of the units, after consultation with their staffs, to hand me a list of the numbers who wished to undertake the journey.

I gathered at the time of the conference that the sentiment generally, but especially that of Dr. Hutchinson, Dr. Banks, and Dr. Barrie, who were in possession of their equipment, appeared to be in favour of remaining. Such being the case arrangements were made in the course of the next two days to establish the units newly arrived in buildings at Vrnjatchka Banja, where I trust they have been able to carry on work.

The enquiries made amongst the personnel of the units showed that for the conveyance of those members who wished to

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leave, probably some 30 or 40 carts would be required. For this number I accordingly applied to the military commandant at Kralievo, but was met with the reply that he had not one single cart to spare at his disposal. As the Russian minister, who happened to be still at Kralievo, had likewise some units on his hands, I enquired of him what course he proposed to follow under the circumstances. He replied that since he had found it impossible to obtain transport from the Government, he was directing those Russian units which did not possess their own means of locomotion to return to Nish and there await events. I nevertheless thought it desirable to make some further attempt, and I therefore returned to Krusevatz and applied for transport direct to Colonel Pavlovitch, the chief of the staff.

Colonel Pavlovitch, while evidently anxious to assist to the best of his ability, was unable to promise me more than 10 carts. He stated that all they had were urgently required for the transport of ammunition and other necessaries for the army, and he did not at the moment feel justified in detaining them for other purposes.

With this number, therefore, it was necessary to be content; and having accordingly notified the units to have those of their members who wished to leave ready to start from Kralievo on the morning of 2nd November, I returned to that town myself to superintend arrangements for their departure.

The state of affairs at Kralievo was anything but reassuring The German army, advancing from Kragujevatz, had already reached and passed Gori Milanovatz, whilst the sound of the guns of the Austrian army coming from Tchachak, only some 30 kilometres to the west, could already be plainly heard. Troops, wounded, refugees—by rail, on foot, in carts and every other sort of conveyance—were crowding into Kralievo in endless streams from the west, the north, and the east, all with the one idea of escaping by the road which leads from there to the Sandjak. Signs of panic were visible, and these were increased by the visits of Austrian aeroplanes, as the Austrian forces drew nearer. The town itself was choked with humanity, and by far the greater majority of persons had neither lodging nor even shelter, but simply lived and slept in the muddy streets. Bread was unobtainable except by military order, and other food was scarce. The railway station was blocked with trucks, and its approaches with material of all kinds which, though urgently needed elsewhere, the railway officials were unable to deal with owing, partly, to the general confusion, partly to lack of means of transport. To add to difficulties the state of the roads had

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become appalling. It may convey some idea of this if I mention that in approaching the station my motor-car became embedded in the mud and resisted the efforts of four oxen to extricate it. It was finally hauled out by two motor-lorries.

On the 2nd November, as the carts promised by Colonel Pavlovitch were punctually forthcoming, a party of about 20 from the units, mostly orderlies of military age, set out from Kralievo for Novi Bazar. It was my intention at the time to establish a camp either at Novi Bazar or at Mitrovitza, where the detachments of personnel could assemble and thence be forwarded on, either to Monastir or through Montenegro, as circumstances might indicate. This party had therefore instructions to leave two orderlies and two tents, together with some provisions, at Novi Bazar, there to await the arrival of further hospital personnel.

I have mentioned that some five truckloads of foodstuffs, etc., had been sent by me from Nish to Kralievo. These I now despatched, together with a sum of money (29,000 dinars), in charge of an orderly for the use of the units which had remained at Vrnjatchka Banja.

After the first party had left I was fortunately able to obtain some 10 more bullock carts which were needed for the transport of Dr. McGregor's unit, whose intention it was to open a dressing-station further south. On the 3rd November I myself left for Mitrovitza, where the Government and Foreign Ministers were already established, and which place, I had ascertained, being at the head of the railway, would offer greater facilities than Novi Bazar for sending the units out either via Monastir or Montenegro. For this information I was indebted to the energy of Mrs. Moore, Mr. West, and Mr. Mawson, who, during my stay at Kralievo, undertook to make a dash to Mitrovitza and back. The journey, which was accomplished in a small Ford car, occupied only three days—in itself a remarkable feat taking into account all the difficulties they had to contend with. On the road to Mitrovitza I overtook the party despatched from Kralievo the previous day and instructed them likewise to proceed to Mitrovitza. These instructions were, however, completely disregarded; and the party proceeded to Novi Bazar, a fact which caused much inconvenience, as I was thereby deprived of the use of the carts, which I had intended to send back for the benefit of the others.

The road south from Kralievo passes through Rashka and there divides, one branch leading to Novi Bazar and the other to Mitrovitza, which is the rail head of the line from Skoplje. As

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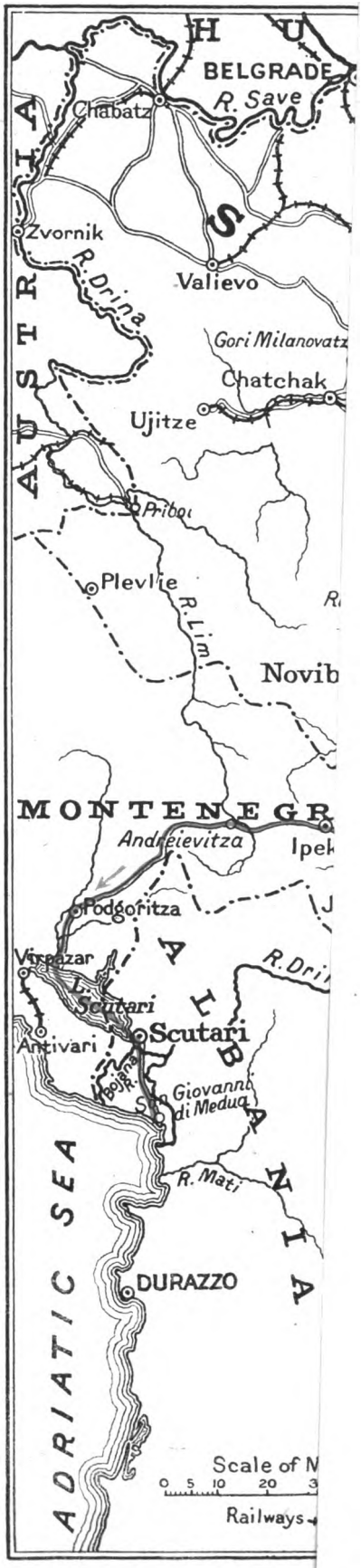

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far as Rashka, although encumbered by innumerable military convoys and carts with refugees, the road proved to be tolerable. But from this point on to Mitrovitza, a distance of some 70 kilometres, the road along the Ibar valley had been rendered both difficult and dangerous by washouts and mountain torrents, and except for the timely appearance of oxen and the ubiquitous Austrian prisoner at some of the fords, I should have been unable to reach Mitrovitza with my motor-car. A motor-lorry belonging to Admiral Troubridge's party remained in the middle of a torrent for some 12 hours. I deeply regret to say that the state of this road was the cause some days later of an accident to a motor-lorry in which Mrs. Toughill, a member of the Scottish Women's unit, lost her life. It likewise prevented my returning from Mitrovitza to Rashka, where I might have given more assistance to the units arriving from the north, as the repairs to my car occupied some six days.

Although I found on my arrival at Mitrovitza that the stream of refugees from the north had scarcely yet arrived so far, the town was nevertheless already considerably filled with the refugees from Skoplje. The prospect, therefore, was not encouraging, and it was obvious that there would be much difficulty in finding accommodation and food for the personnel which I expected to collect there.

It was not long, indeed, before Mitrovitza assumed the same aspect as Kralievo, and the want, overcrowding, and misery which had been apparent at the latter place became still more evident here. The bread distributed by the order of the military authorities, which at Kralievo had still contained a certain proportion of wheat flour, was now entirely made from maize, and was bitter and sodden. The streets were filled with half-starved soldiery, mostly barefoot, and with refugees of every description and condition seeking for food and shelter with very little chance of finding either. Some of the wounded who had succeeded in hobbling the many miles from Kralievo presented a specially piteous sight.

The local authorities were so busily engaged with the demands of the military that they could scarcely be expected to give much attention to the relief of distress, and I therefore thought it advisable to hand a sum of money to the Bishop for the purpose of buying bread to distribute daily amongst the refugees.

A decision had now to be taken as to the route by which the units should leave Serbia, whether by Prisrend, Dibra, or

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Monastir, or by Ipek and Montenegro. The opinion of the majority of the Serbian officers appeared to be in favour of the former; and the arrival of Dr. Hamilton and four nurses of the Wounded Allies, who had come direct from Podgoritza *via* Ipek, and reported that there was no food and no means of transport, and that it was doubtful whether it would be possible to find a way out of Montenegro as no ships were calling at Medua, inclined me to the belief that this opinion was correct.

In view of the fact that the route *via* Dibra was said to present no great difficulties and that, at the time, owing to some slight success of the Serbian army at Katchanik, it was even hoped the railway to Skoplje and Salonika might be re-opened if the Allied troops pressed on with sufficient forces, I telegraphed to the units which had remained on the Krusevatz-Kralievo line stating that I now thought it possible to make adequate arrangements for as many of their personnel as might choose to leave, and they should therefore send them through to me at Mitrovitza at once. I am not aware whether these telegrams ever reached their destination, as two days later the fall of Kralievo was reported.

Since I foresaw great difficulty in providing transport, food, etc., for large parties, the plan I proposed to follow was to send on small detachments from time to time as they arrived at Mitrovitz from the north. The first party thus to be despatched consisted of Mrs. Moore (Belgrade Orphanage), Dr. Hamilton and her four nurses, and one Red Cross orderly, who had the opportunity of travelling under the protection of part of Admiral Troubridge's naval detachment, which was itself being sent out by the Dibra-Monastir road.

In the course of some 10 days, personnel from the Scottish Women, from Mrs. Stobart's unit, and a detachment of orderlies from the Second British Farmers, numbering in all some 50, were assembled.

It had meanwhile come to my notice that Colonel Mihailovitch, of the Serbian medical staff, had received instructions from the military authorities to make arrangements for the journey to Salonika of some 60 French military doctors who had been employed with the Serbian army. On getting into touch with him, to ascertain how he proposed to accomplish this, I found that his instructions covered also the personnel of all the foreign medical missions. The arrangements which he contemplated were to forward those under his charge from Mitrovitza to Ferisovitch by train, and thence by bullock-cart to Prisrend. From this point he hoped, with the aid of the general staff, to

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obtain pony transport as far as Dibra, where carriages and possibly motor transport sent from Monastir would be available. For that portion of the route, namely, between Lium-Kula and Dibra, where no food or shelter could be found, he informed me that he was establishing stations in tents where there would also be depots of the most necessary provisions. In order to facilitate this scheme, I requested Sir Charles Des Graz to telegraph to the General commanding the British troops at Salonika, requesting him to put two motor-cars and two motor lorries at the disposal of the British Vice-Consul at Monastir with a view to the transport of the British units from Dibra to that place. I have reason to believe that this suggestion was duly acted upon.

On the 15th November a party of about 120 British and French accordingly left Mitrovitza by train for Ferisovitch, under the charge of Colonel Mihailovitch.

The day following their departure the general headquarters staff issued orders to the Government officials and Foreign ministers to leave Mitrovitza without delay, as owing to an advance of the Bulgarian right wing at Gillane, communication with Prisrend might later become precarious. As I was not aware of there being any further British personnel en route from the north to Mitrovitza, and as Dr. May, who had arrived with a portion of the Stobart unit, had declared to me her intention of remaining and working in the hospital, I left together with the headquarters staff for Prisrend, having requested Dr. Curçin to make the necessary arrangements for Dr. May's should they change their mind and wish to follow on later.

Just before reaching Prisrend I overtook a detachment of some 30 Scottish women who had been sent by Dr. Inglis under the charge of Mr. Smith (to whom the greatest credit is due for the manner in which he conducted his party throughout) from Krusevatz down the road leading through Brus Kurshumlieh and Pristina. In due course the party from Mitrovitza under Colonel Mihailovitch reached Prisrend, but I fear they already suffered some discomfort, as during their march snow began to fall, and rendered progress difficult. On arrival at Prisrend the units were housed in the newly-built cholera sheds, which, being heated with stoves and littered with hay, had been rendered fairly comfortable.

On the 17th November, when arrangements to convey the units by the Dibra-Monastir road were already well advanced, a new development presented itself. Colonel Mihailovitch came to me with an order he had received from the general staff to the

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effect that owing to the insecurity of this road, which was said to be threatened by the enemy, all the medical missions were to be deflected to Ipek, and to be taken out through Montenegro. This notice was in the nature of a peremptory military order, and no discussion was therefore possible; although, in my opinion, the Monastir route would have been shorter and would have presented fewer obstacles.

Colonel Mihailovitch informed me that he had already begun to make arrangements in accordance with this order, and that some five motor lorries and 40 bullock carts had been placed at his disposal by the military authorities to start with the units for Ipek two days later. He requested me, in the circumstances, to go on ahead and endeavour to make arrangements for housing and provisioning the parties at Djakova and Ipek. From that point to Podgoritza Colonel Mihailovitch feared no arrangements would be possible as no villages of any importance except Andreievitza were to be found on the road. He stated, however, that he had some 5,000 lbs. of flour, and that by sending the units in small parties during several days he expected to be able to provide for them sufficiently to enable them to make the journey without any great privations.

After having telegraphed to our minister at Cettinje, requesting him to urge the Montenegrin Government to instruct the local authorities to afford necessary assistance in the matter of food and transport along the route, and likewise requesting him to make arrangements for a ship to embark the units at some port on the Adriatic coast, I left for Djakova and Ipek by motor-car on the morning of 19th November in company with Mons. Miuschkovitch, the Montenegrin minister accredited to Serbia.

At Djakova the Montenegrin authorities engaged themselves to accommodate the units in an empty school house and to provide food for them on their arrival.

It here became necessary for me to abandon my motor-car, which was left in a shed, the cylinders and other parts having been removed and hidden elsewhere. Inasmuch as that town was occupied by the Austrians some two weeks later it is unlikely that the car, notwithstanding this precaution, will be at any time recoverable.

From here the following day I proceeded with Mr. Leslie (my secretary) and Captain Petronievitch (the Serbian officer attached to me) and Mons. Miuschkovitch on horseback to Ipek, which we reached the same evening. We found that the authorities had been duly notified by the Government of our arrival. On my approaching the subject of arrangement for the units they

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stated there would be no difficulty with regard to food and accommodation; but Mons. Petrovitch, the prefect of the town, regretted that, owing to the large number of refugees who already had lately arrived, to the needs of the army for ammunition and to the orders he had received to find transport for the Serbian Government officials and Diplomatic Corps, he was unable to guarantee a sufficiency of ponies for the use of the medical units. He thought that in any case it would be necessary for them to remain for some time at Ipek and await their turn as opportunity offered.

Colonel Mihailovitch, in the meantime, having also arrived in Ipek, one day ahead of the units, which had reached Detchane, and having undertaken the arrangements for their accommodation, I considered it advisable myself to hurry on in order to make such provision as might be possible for them along the route to Podgoritza, and to urge the authorities at Cettinje to make further efforts on their behalf.

In order that some idea may be formed of the hardships through which the units have since passed, I think it advisable to give a short description of the route which they were called upon to traverse.

Immediately on leaving Ipek the road becomes a mere mountain path, at times scarcely two feet wide, with a high wall of rock on one side and a precipice and mountain torrent on the other. This path, which underfoot is rocky and uneven, winds up a mountain gorge, rising continuously. The higher the altitude the more difficult becomes the progress, as the track during most months of the year is covered with frozen snow, and both for ponies and pedestrians foothold becomes increasingly precarious. When at length, after some eight or ten hours' strenuous marching, the path emerges from the gorge, there rises before one the actual pass, with the path winding up in zig-zags, some 2,000 feet higher, and here the conditions for both man and beast become positively dangerous.

Some distance short of the summit, which is over 5,000 feet above sea level, there exists a small khan built of wood named Bieluka, which usually constitutes the halting place at the end of the first day's march. The khan consists of one room capable of sheltering perhaps some 30 travellers. There is no other sleeping accommodation than the floor, neither can any refreshment except tea be obtained.

As I was anxious to proceed as quickly as possible in order to reach Andreievitza and Cettinje, and to arrange for pack

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ponies to be sent back to Ipek, I decided to continue, and after a heartbreaking climb of some two hours with a thermometer far below freezing point, and in the teeth of a bitter wind, and after an almost more difficult descent of three hours in the dark, over a path of ice and frozen mud, we finally reached Velika 14 hours after leaving Ipek. At Velika there is scarcely more accommodation to be found than at Bieluka, but the shelter and warmth of a filthy khan, nevertheless, was most acceptable. From this point Andreievitza is only some five hours distant, and the route presented no special difficulties, except that its rocky nature, and the mud and cold at times rendered the conditions the reverse of pleasant.

At Andreievitza the prefect showed every disposition to do his utmost for the units on their arrival, but was unable to promise to send back any pack ponies.

The road from Andreievitza to Podgoritza, a distance of about 120 kilometres, is under ordinary circumstances excellent and adapted for motor transport. Unfortunately, however, owing to the constant rain during the previous month, landslips had occurred, and some bridges had been washed away on the Andreievitza side of Lievareka, 62 kilometres distant. This fact necessitated continuing the journey on horseback and on foot. On this stretch another pass—some three to four thousand feet high—has to be crossed, on which at the time there was, of course, a considerable amount of snow; but any difficulties encountered were solely due to a desire to lessen the distance by taking short cuts, as the main road itself presents no obstacles.

I fear that in crossing these two passes and generally on the road between Ipek and Levareka, the personnel of the units must almost without exception have suffered severely from cold, want of food and shelter, and other hardships, especially as towards the last seven days of November there was a heavy snowstorm. It is a matter of great regret to me that I was unable to do anything to alleviate the miseries through which they must have passed. Colonel Mihailovitch, I am sure, did all in his power to make such arrangements as were possible, but he was attempting an almost hopeless task. To make arrangements successfully for the transport and provisioning of so large a number of persons across the mountains in winter, and through a country where no food was to be found, would require some considerable time for organization, with tents and provisions at hand, instead of just the few days which we had at our disposal, with no material and no supplies to draw upon.

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In retrospect, I think the point of view to take is that it is a matter for congratulation that every member of our unit who started from Ipek came through without serious accident; and surely for this great credit and our gratitude are due to Colonel Mihailovitch, whose efforts contributed to this happy issue.

But, if Colonel Mihailovitch was so fortunate, it must be said that his good fortune was also greatly due to those under his charge. The endurance, courage, and cheerfulness exhibited by our nurses and the few orderlies accompanying them under the most trying conditions deserve the unbounded admiration of all. Their conduct has been entirely above praise, and has profoundly impressed all those who witnessed it. The qualities which they displayed during this retreat immensely facilitated the task of those who felt responsible for their welfare, and I, personally, owe them a debt of gratitude in this respect which I find difficult sufficiently to acknowledge.

After spending some four days at Cettinje, where I had an audience of the King, and urged His Majesty to make arrangements for the despatch of further means of transport to Ipek, and from which place also I telegraphed to our ambassador in Rome enquiring as to the possibilities of obtaining a ship to embark the units at Medua, I proceeded on the 29th November to Scutari, which, I had arranged with Colonel Mihailovitch, should be the rendezvous of the units pending the arrangements for their embarkation.

Accommodation to the extent of some 70 beds had here, at my request, been secured by His Majesty's Consul in some of the hotels, but after a personal inspection of the latter, notwithstanding my desire to give the units as many comforts as possible after their previous discomforts, I decided that it would be preferable for them to live for the few days before their further departure in empty houses, even though these might contain no beds. As the units gradually came in, the question of supplying food become one of considerable difficulty. This difficulty was, however, due more to the peculiar circumstances obtaining in Scutari than to actual shortage of food at the time. Practically the only money in the possession of all those arriving from Serbia was Serbian and Montenegrin paper money. This, however, the Albanian merchants and traders who control the food supplies of the town refused to accept save on their own terms. During some days it was possible to change the notes at a very heavy discount, but when the town became crowded with Serbian soldiers and refugees, and scarcity of food began to make itself keenly felt, the shops refused to take paper money

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on any terms whatever. Gold or silver coinage was at the same time not procurable in any amount that would have enabled us to finance the units for more than a very few days.

To illustrate this difficulty about currency, I may mention that in view of the great distress among the Serbian refugees arriving at Scutari, I endeavoured, in conjunction with the Serbian and Montenegrin municipal authorities, to establish shelters and a soup kitchen. Apparently all arrangements were satisfactorily made, and I was on the point of opening an account at the bank for financing this scheme, when the prefect informed me that unless I could arrange to pay for the necessary provisions in silver it would be altogether impossible to proceed, as the Albanians refused to sell for paper. I made every effort, both at the bank and by application to other sources, to obtain silver in return for a cheque on London, but my efforts were in every case unsuccessful. Under the circumstances, it was finally arranged that I should leave a cheque for five hundred pounds with Mr. Rigg, who had been sent out to Scutari by the Serbian Relief Fund, and that the Serbian minister of finance, who expected shortly to receive consignments of silver currency from Salonika, should cash this for him in coin on its arrival.

In other respects the conditions at Scutari were a repetition of those we had experienced at Kralievo, Mitrovitza, Prisrend, and Ipek. At every town where we arrived we were soon followed by crowds of soldiers and refugees, who brought with them misery, starvation and squalor, and in time induced attacks by hostile aeroplanes. At Scutari the naturally depressing effect of these conditions was heightened by the fact that during our stay there an Austrian squadron from Cattaro appeared before Medua and sunk some 11 ships in the harbour—an event which occasioned us grave doubts as to whether any further food ships would be sent to Medua on which the units would find an opportunity to embark.

I nevertheless determined that anything would be preferable to keeping the units indefinitely at Scutari, and that it was advisable they should set out with the least possible delay either for San Giovanni di Medua, or, if necessary, Durazzo, and there await the chance of a ship to convey them to Italy.

When my decision to leave Scutari became known I was approached by the Russian minister with the request that I would take charge of the Russian units also, comprising a personnel of some 60 to 70, both doctors and nurses, and permit them to take passage with us to Italy. To this request I willingly consented.

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On application to the Montenegrin authorities for means of transport to Medua I was able, after some negotiation, to secure 45 bullock-carts, 80 pack ponies, and six horse carriages. Having likewise ascertained that provisions in the nature of bread and tinned meat were available, a caravan of British and Russian about 180 strong set out from Scutari on the 11th December.

The distance is only about 32 miles, but the road being in places extremely heavy, a day and a half is required to accomplish it. There being no other accommodation one night was passed in the open by the roadside. Fortunately the weather was mild and dry. We arrived at Medua the following afternoon, December 12th. On the way we passed a number of Bulgarian and Austrian prisoners who were being sent to Medua to work cargo. The state of these men was distressing in the extreme; they were mostly in the last stages of exhaustion, emaciation, and scarcely able to walk.

At Medua we found a sufficiency of provisions such as bread, bacon, and tinned meat (the two latter recovered from the sunken ships in harbour), but house accommodation was entirely inadequate for all the personnel. With the addition of some tents, however, kindly lent me by Major Paget at Scutari, it was possible finally to provide for all.

The evening previous to our departure from Scutari I had received a message from Rome, through the Italian consular authorities, that the American sailing-ship *Albania*, then discharging at Durazzo, would call at Medua a few days later, and would there embark the women belonging to the foreign medical missions and also any "men debarred from military service."

This latter phrase gave rise to considerable speculation whether doctors of military age would be included thereunder. In reply to numerous enquiries addressed to me by Russian doctors, I stated that the decision must rest with the captain of the American ship, but that in any case I feared that orderlies of military age, of whom there were some 12 British and a few Russians, would not be able to avail themselves of this ship. In view of this, the day following our arrival at Medua the British orderlies intimated to me their desire to set out for Durazzo with the least possible delay. Although the reports as regards the road between Alessio and Durazzo were by no means encouraging, I saw no alternative to their proceeding unless they wished to remain at Medua on the chance of getting a passage

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on a food ship, which at the time appeared to be extremely problematical.

It was my intention at the time, after having embarked the nurses on board the *Albania*, which I hoped to be able to do within the next two days, myself to follow on to Durazzo by road in company with Mr. Keeling of H.M. Legation, whom Sir Charles Des Graz, our minister, had very kindly detailed to help me and Mr. Leslie, my secretary, and there assist our party of orderlies to obtain a ship. On the 14th December I telegraphed both to Essad Pasha and to the Italian Minister at Durazzo requesting them to give our party all the assistance possible and interest themselves on their behalf. On the 14th December, therefore, a party consisting of some 40 British and Russians, led by Mr. Izzard, of the Wounded Allies, left Medua for Durazzo. I fear they met with extremely difficult conditions and many hardships on the road, but they eventually arrived safely.

Meanwhile, although I received various telegrams to the effect that the *Albania* had left Durazzo for Medua, her continued delay in arriving caused us considerable anxiety, especially as we perceived certain indications that the provisions which had at first been plentiful were rapidly diminishing. It was therefore a relief, on the sixth day of our stay, to see a small Italian steamer, the *Brindisi*, entering the harbour and threading her way in between the sunken ships.

I lost no time in approaching the naval officer in charge as regards the embarkation of the personnel under my care, both British and Russian. Having received orders to embark a number of women and children of the Italian community he appeared doubtful at first whether there would be sufficient room, but finally consented. It must be admitted that his doubts were justifiable, for on embarking that same night it was found that we numbered over 400 persons, which, on a ship of that size, rendered conditions extremely unpleasant.

Shortly before sailing, at 11 p.m., Dr. May, with her unit—some 30 in all—which had been brought through by Dr. Curçin, who had accompanied them the whole way from Kragujevatz, and had been indefatigable in his efforts on their behalf, arrived in Medua and came on board. A few minutes later, when the steamer was actually on the point of departure, Dr. Clemow also came to tell me that his unit had arrived in Medua, and begged me to detain the ship to give them time to embark. I felt it, however, inexpedient to make this request to the commander, as the steamer was already in motion, and an

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escort of cruisers and destroyers was awaiting us outside. Owing to the constant presence of Austrian submarines, the entry into or the departure from Medua is always attended with considerable risk, and it would therefore not have been at all advisable to interfere with arrangements already made.

The run to Brindisi occupied some 12 hours, and though uncomfortable was uneventful. It seemed more than probable, in view of the rumours of typhus and cholera at Scutari, we might be subjected to quarantine on arrival, and I have reason to believe that at first something of the kind was actually contemplated. But eventually, after a short period of suspense, we found that by the great courtesy of the Italian naval authorities most of the vexatious formalities which are usual on disembarkation were to be dispensed with, and we were permitted to land.

I should have been glad if possible to have given the units at least one night's rest at Brindisi, but the authorities informed me that no accommodation would be found in the town, and that we must in any case proceed to Bari. This being the case I considered it best for the units to proceed straight home. I therefore made what arrangements I could for them to leave for Paris the same evening, and I likewise telegraphed to H.M. Embassy there requesting that they should be met and assisted on arrival. Their departure was, I fear, a somewhat hurried one, but with the assistance of some petty officers from H.M. ships in port was finally successfully accomplished.

It would, indeed, be more than ingratitude on my part were I not to mention those, viz., Captain Petronievitch and Mr. Leslie, who accompanied me—the one as far as Scutari, the other throughout the journey from Nish to London.

Captain Petronievitch's knowledge of his country and his people and his popularity with all classes in Serbia procured for us advantages without which our difficulties would have been greatly increased; whilst of Mr. Leslie's services to me as my secretary, of his resource in all circumstances, of his willingness to undertake any duty, and of his solicitude for the units, I cannot sufficiently express my appreciation.

Mr. Keeling, of H.M. Legation, as I have stated above, joined at Scutari, and his assistance on this part of the journey, especially his knowlege of Turkish, proved altogether invaluable.

I cannot more fitly conclude this report, which I fear conveys but a very inadequate idea of the hardships suffered and of the magnificent spirit displayed by the units during a retreat which

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for some entailed a march of over 200 miles on foot, than by recording that the day before my departure from Scutari the Crown Prince of Serbia sent for me and desired me to convey to the personnel of our medical missions in Serbia the expression of his unqualified admiration, likewise his own and his countrymen's heartfelt gratitude for the sacrifices these missions had made on behalf of Serbia and for their constant and untiring services to the wounded and sick of the Serbian army. Although I was able to give this message privately to some of the leaders of the units at Medua, no occasion presented itself for conveying it to all the units collectively, and I therefore gladly take this opportunity of placing His Royal Highness's words upon record.

For my part I wish to say that nothing could have exceeded the kindness, consideration, and attention that were shown to the British Units and myself personally by the Serbian Authorities, both military and civil, with whom we came into contact, and that their assistance was in many cases given to the Units at great sacrifice to themselves.

I have the honour, etc.,

RALPH PAGET.

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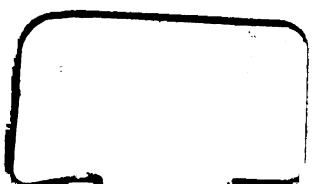

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